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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve equitable access to certain benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the survivors of veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

M. _____ introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve equitable access to certain benefits of the Department of Veterans Affairs for the survivors of veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Honoring Our Prom-
5 ise: Ensuring Equity in Accessing Military and Veteran
6 Survivors Benefits Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO CERTAIN BENEFITS OF DE-**
2 **PARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR SUR-**
3 **VIVORS OF VETERANS.**

4 (a) COLLECTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA.—

5 (1) COLLECTION.—Chapter 53 of title 38,
6 United States Code, is amended by adding at the
7 end the following new section (and conforming the
8 table of sections at the beginning of such chapter ac-
9 cordingly):

10 **“§ 5321. Demographic data of certain survivor bene-**
11 **ficiaries**

12 “(a) COLLECTION.—The Secretary, in consultation
13 with the entities described in subsection (b), shall—

14 “(1) develop a method to collect the demo-
15 graphic data of each covered survivor receiving dis-
16 ability and indemnity compensation under chapter
17 13 of this title, pension under chapter 15 of this
18 title, or increased pension (or additional compensa-
19 tion or allowances) under this title based on the
20 need of regular aid and attendance or by reason of
21 being permanently housebound; and

22 “(2) collect demographic data pursuant to the
23 method developed under paragraph (1).

24 “(b) COVERED ENTITIES FOR CONSULTATION.—The
25 entities described in this subsection are the following:

1 “(1) The Advisory Committee on Minority Vet-
2 erans established under section 544 of this title.

3 “(2) The Advisory Committee on Women Vet-
4 erans established under section 542 of this title.

5 “(3) The Veterans’ Family, Caregiver, and Sur-
6 vivor Advisory Committee of the Department of Vet-
7 erans Affairs, or successor advisory committee.

8 “(4) Veterans service organizations.

9 “(c) DESIGNATION OF UNDERSERVED DEMO-
10 GRAPHICS.—The Secretary shall—

11 “(1) designate as an underserved demographic
12 any demographic the Secretary determines, taking
13 into account the demographic data collected under
14 subsection (a), is underserved with respect to the
15 benefits specified in such subsection; and

16 “(2) review such designations on at least a bi-
17 ennial basis.

18 “(d) INCLUSION IN ANNUAL REPORTS.—For each
19 annual benefits report of the Veterans Benefits Adminis-
20 tration, the Secretary shall include as part of the report
21 information concerning the demographic data collected
22 under subsection (a) during the fiscal year covered by the
23 report.

24 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 “(1) The term ‘covered survivor’ means a sur-
2 viving spouse, child, or parent of a veteran.

3 “(2) The term ‘demographic data’ includes,
4 with respect to an individual, the following:

5 “(A) Race.

6 “(B) Ethnicity.

7 “(C) Tribal affiliation, if any.

8 “(D) LGBTQIA+ status.

9 “(E) Geographic location.

10 “(3) The term ‘veterans service organization’
11 means any organization recognized by the Secretary
12 under section 5902 of this title.”.

13 (2) DEADLINE; APPLICABILITY.—

14 (A) DEADLINE.—The Secretary of Vet-
15 erans Affairs shall develop the data collection
16 method under subsection (a) of section 5321 of
17 title 38, United States Code (as added by para-
18 graph (1)) and commence the collection of data
19 pursuant to such method by not later than 180
20 days after the date of the enactment of this
21 Act.

22 (B) APPLICABILITY REGARDING ANNUAL
23 REPORTS.—The requirement under subsection
24 (d) of such section 5321 shall apply with re-
25 spect to the annual benefits report of the Vet-

1 erans Benefits Administration submitted not
2 later than one year after the date on which the
3 Secretary commences the collection of data
4 under subsection (a) of such section, and each
5 such annual benefits report submitted there-
6 after.

7 (b) OUTREACH AND EDUCATION.—

8 (1) STRATEGY FOR UNDERSERVED DEMO-
9 GRAPHICS.—Not later than one year after the date
10 on which the Secretary commences the collection of
11 demographic data under section 5321(a) of title 38,
12 United States Code (as added by subsection (a)), the
13 Secretary shall develop an outreach and education
14 strategy for raising awareness regarding the benefits
15 specified in such section among covered survivors
16 who belong to an underserved demographic.

17 (2) GRANTS FOR OUTREACH AND EDU-
18 CATION.—

19 (A) GRANT PROGRAM.—The Secretary
20 shall carry out a program under which the Sec-
21 retary may award grants to veterans service or-
22 ganizations for the purpose of assisting with
23 outreach and education efforts pursuant to the
24 strategy under paragraph (1).

1 (B) PRIORITY.—In awarding a grant
2 under the program under subparagraph (A),
3 the Secretary shall give priority to an applicant
4 that is a veterans service organization with a
5 focus on serving individuals who belong to an
6 underserved demographic.

7 (C) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—The recipient of
8 a grant under this paragraph shall receive an
9 amount of not more than \$10,000.

10 (D) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIA-
11 TIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated
12 to the Secretary to carry out this paragraph
13 \$2,000,000 for fiscal years 2023 to 2025.

14 (3) COORDINATED PROCESS FOR INFORMATION
15 SHARING.—The Secretary, in coordination with the
16 Commissioner of the Social Security Administration
17 and the Director of the Centers for Disease Control
18 and Prevention, shall develop a process for distrib-
19 uting, upon the receipt by the Secretary of a notifi-
20 cation of the death of a veteran, information to each
21 covered survivor of the veteran regarding the bene-
22 fits and services to which the covered survivor may
23 be entitled under the laws administered by the Sec-
24 retary.

1 (4) REVIEW OF WEBSITES AND CERTAIN MATE-
2 RIALS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of
3 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall review
4 each publicly accessible website of the Department,
5 and any script or other standardized material devel-
6 oped for use at call centers of the Department, to
7 ensure such websites and materials are—

8 (A) inclusive with respect to the specific
9 needs of covered survivors; and

10 (B) designed to facilitate access to infor-
11 mation regarding benefits and services to which
12 covered survivors may be entitled under the
13 laws administered by the Secretary.

14 (5) PRE-NEED ELIGIBILITY OF VETERANS FOR
15 CERTAIN BURIAL BENEFITS.—

16 (A) EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.—The Under
17 Secretary for Memorial Affairs shall carry out
18 education activities to ensure that veterans who
19 belong to an underserved demographic are
20 made aware of any pre-need eligibility for burial
21 in a national cemetery under section 2303 of
22 title 38, United States Code.

23 (B) REPORTS.—Beginning not later than
24 one year after the date of the enactment of this
25 Act, and annually thereafter for five years, the

1 Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs shall sub-
2 mit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of
3 the House of Representatives and the Senate a
4 report on the efforts taken by the Under Sec-
5 retary pursuant to subparagraph (A).

6 (c) ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY FOR OFFICE OF
7 SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE.—Not later than one year after
8 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
9 shall—

10 (1) conduct an assessment of the resources of
11 the Office of Survivors Assistance of the Department
12 of Veterans Affairs, or successor office; and

13 (2) develop a strategy to ensure the availability
14 of resources necessary for the function of such of-
15 fice, as determined by the Secretary as a result of
16 the assessment.

17 (d) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

18 (1) The terms “covered survivor” and “veterans
19 service organization” have the meanings given those
20 terms in section 5321(e) of title 38, United States
21 Code (as added by subsection (a)).

22 (2) The term “underserved demographic”
23 means a demographic designated as an underserved
24 demographic by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

- 1 under section 5321(c) of title 38, United States
- 2 Code (as added by subsection (a)).